

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 577

By Williams

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of the legendary Bill France, Jr., former Chairman of NASCAR.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Mr. Bill France, Jr., who transformed the National Association for Stock Car Racing (NASCAR) from a small Southern sport into an extremely profitable conglomerate and household name during his illustrious thirty-one-year reign as its Chairman; and

WHEREAS, Mr. France made his last public appearance on February 12, 2007, at the Bill France Hot Dog Dinner, at which NASCAR's luminaries gathered to "roast and toast" this remarkable gentleman as part of the festivities leading up to the Daytona 500; and

WHEREAS, the extraordinary success that NASCAR enjoys today, both as a commercial and an entertainment enterprise, is directly attributable to the visionary leadership of Mr. France; and

WHEREAS, Mr. France was a shrewd businessman who was protective of this family-owned company, yet he always acted in NASCAR's best interests; and

WHEREAS, as he deftly guided NASCAR into mainstream America, Mr. France remained true to the premise that no single person was bigger than the sport, an important part of his legacy which will surely survive his passing in this most fan-friendly of all sports; and

WHEREAS, Mr. France was a strong leader who was willing to make difficult decisions and had the courage to stand by those decisions; although he was an authoritarian figure, he had earned the universal respect of his employees and drivers, and accorded them respect in return; and

WHEREAS, Bill France, Jr., assumed the mantle of leadership as Chairman of NASCAR in 1972, when he replaced his father, NASCAR founder William Henry Getty France, who retired 25 years after forming the company; and

WHEREAS, although it seemed impossible at the time, NASCAR enjoyed even greater success during Bill France, Jr.'s thirty-one years as Chairman, as he improved upon his father's legacy through innovative technology and the astute utilization of mass media; and

WHEREAS, his productivity as Chairman of NASCAR owed much to the in-depth knowledge that he acquired during his rise through the grassroots of racing; and

WHEREAS, as a young man, he served as a flagman, sold concessions, scored races, promoted events, and even assisted in the construction of Daytona International Speedway; and

WHEREAS, Mr. France worked twelve-hour days, seven days a week, driving compactors, bulldozers, and graders during the thirteen months it took to build Daytona; and

WHEREAS, upon assuming the chairmanship of NASCAR, Mr. France transformed a regional sport rich in Southern tradition into a truly national sport, as half-mile dirt tracks quickly gave way to superspeedways; and

WHEREAS, he also expanded the loyal fan base of the Deep South to include sold-out tracks and rabid fans across America; and

WHEREAS, Mr. France is also directly responsible for the huge television and mass media audiences that NASCAR demands today, a cultural trend that began with the television broadcast of the 1979 Daytona 500 from flag to flag; and

WHEREAS, just as his father had groomed him to lead and manage NASCAR, Bill France, Jr., continued this tradition of family ownership and oversight of the company when he relinquished its chairmanship in favor of his son, Brian France, in 2003; and

WHEREAS, the France family's singular legacy in racing is also being extended and expanded by Mr. France's daughter, Lesa France Kennedy, who runs International Speedway Corporation (ISC), the primary owner and operator of the major U.S. race tracks, and his younger brother Jim, who serves as Executive Vice President of NASCAR and Vice Chairman of ISC; and

WHEREAS, this extraordinary gentleman is also survived by his wife, Betty Jane France, and three grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Lowe's Motor Speedway President Humpy Wheeler has rightly said of Bill France, Jr.: "He will go down as one of the great leaders of American sport in the 20th century, and his contribution to motorsports is immeasurable."; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to fondly remember this exceptional entrepreneur, sportsman, and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we celebrate the life and honor the memory of Bill France, Jr., as we reflect upon his transformation of American sports culture through his vision, leadership, and hard work as Chairman of NASCAR.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family and many friends of Mr. France.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.